

EIGHTH CHURCH  
OF  
CHRIST, SCIENTIST

4359 South Michigan Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois

Preliminary Staff Summary of Information  
Submitted to the  
Commission on Chicago Landmarks  
August, 1992

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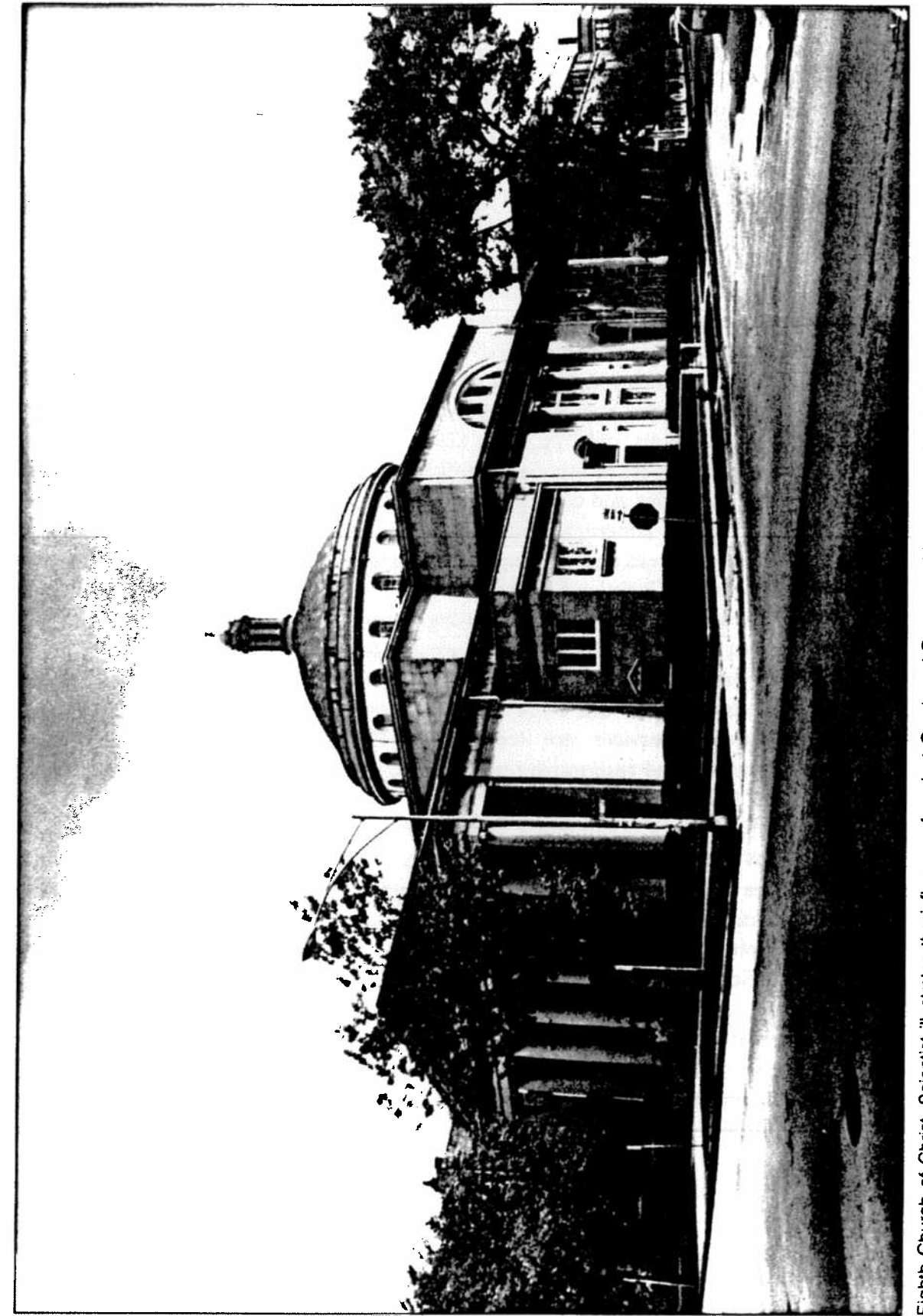
Dates of Construction: 1910-11

Architect: Leon E. Stanhope

Churches, synagogues, and other religious buildings often are the most outstanding visual and historical landmarks in Chicago's neighborhoods due to their size, the quality of architectural design and materials lavished on them, and their associations with the history of their communities. Eighth Church of Christ, Scientist is no exception. A handsome Classical Revival building, it is a fine example of early twentieth-century Christian Science architecture still being used for its original purpose by its original congregation. Located in the Grand Boulevard community area, Eighth Church has been a witness to and participant in the great social changes that have left their mark on the history of the South Side and Chicago itself. Since 1932 this building has housed the oldest African-American Christian Science congregation in the United States.

## A Brief History of Christian Science and its Practices

The origins of Christian Science and its subsequent development, both in terms of its formal organization and its religious practices, played a role in the design of Christian Science churches. The church was founded by Mary Baker Eddy, a native of Bow, New Hampshire, who had investigated alternative methods of healing for many years in an effort to alleviate her chronic bouts of ill health. Her search, both physical and spiritual, led her to formulate the tenets of Christian Science contained in her major work, *Science and Health, with a Key to the Scriptures*, written in 1875 and revised several times before her death in 1910. When no other denomination would accept her teachings connecting the mind and physical health, she and her followers established the Church of Christ, Scientist in Boston in 1879. Converts to the faith were trained at the Massachusetts Metaphysical College, established and operated by Mrs. Eddy, and these new practitioners spread Christian Science beliefs widely. By 1895 there were about 250 Christian Science congregations throughout the country, and by 1910 more than 1,200.



Eighth Church of Christ, Scientist illustrates the influence of ancient Greek and Roman architecture on the design of early twentieth-century Christian Science churches. (Charles M. Pipal, photographer)

Recognizing the need for organizational reforms due to the steady growth of members and new congregations, Mrs. Eddy reorganized the denomination during the 1890s, creating the Mother Church, the First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston and creating a formal framework for the operation of the church and its branch congregations through the publication of the *Manual of the Mother Church*, published in 1895. The *Manual* established in great detail the institutional means of government, form of worship, and other particulars of the Christian Science movement. Last revised in 1906, it has preserved Mrs. Eddy's organizational framework for the church without alteration to the present day.

Christian Science as developed by Mrs. Eddy allows for a certain degree of freedom for branch congregations, albeit with strong direction from the Mother Church. Individual congregations are self-governing through their own board of directors and are responsible for the construction and maintenance of their own buildings. However, the Mother Church retains control of each congregation through several means. Unlike many denominations, there are no regional conferences or other official links between individual Christian Science congregations, only the direct ties between each branch and the Mother Church. All officers and readers of branch congregations must be members of the Mother Church. In addition, the order and content of Sunday services is dictated by the Mother Church, and members of all congregations hear the same readings at the same services.

Both practical needs and philosophical ideals were considered by architects designing the first generation of Christian Science churches. It has been observed that the simplicity of the religious services of this rapidly growing denomination were influenced by the practices of Protestant churches in New England, especially the Congregationalist faith within which Mrs. Eddy was raised. But there also are major differences. Church services are not led by ordained ministers nor are there individual sermons or formally observed sacraments. Instead, Sunday services are led by the First and Second Readers, who make announcements, lead responsive readings, and read passages from the Bible and *Science and Health* from a readers' platform that is the visual focus of the sanctuary. Music plays a role in the form of organ music, the singing of hymns, and the use of vocal soloists. In addition, Wednesday evening "testimony" services allow individual members to share their experiences concerning healing and Christian Science tenets with other members of the congregation.

Philosophical issues also entered the discussion concerning the architectural form of Christian Scientist churches. Christian Scientists disdain the overt use of physical iconography and symbols to represent aspects of their religion. Church auditoriums are not furnished with altars, nor are paintings, sculptures or other representational art included in their decoration. Traditional architectural styles associated with church design, such as the Gothic and Romanesque, had been developed to meet the needs of religions with very different practices and seemed inappropriate for this new religion.

## Solon S. Beman and Christian Science Architecture

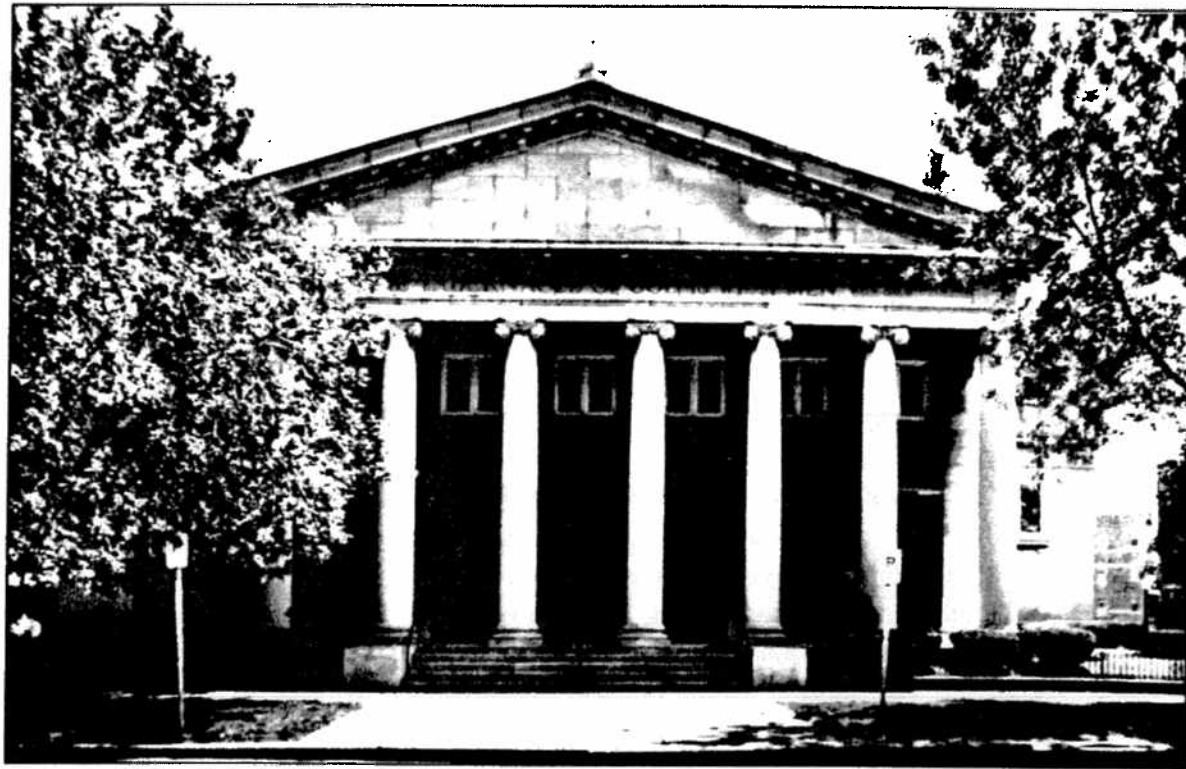
These questions about architectural form and ornament were strongly influenced by Solon S. Beman and his many designs for Christian Science churches. The spread of Christian Science from its New England base to the Midwest occurred soon after Mrs. Eddy's establishment of the Church of Christ, Scientist in 1879. In Chicago, First Church of Christ, Scientist was founded in 1886 at a meeting at the Sherman House. Worshiping in rented quarters for several years, the congregation built a permanent home at 4017 South Drexel Boulevard in 1897. Designed by Beman, the building combined practical auditorium seating within a flattering acoustic environment, all wrapped within a Classical Revival design based on the Erechtheum, an ancient Greek temple built atop the Acropolis. The design was so successful that Beman, a convert to Christian Science, was asked to design the sanctuaries for other Christian Science churches, both in Chicago and throughout the United States. He became, in fact, the *de facto* house architect for the denomination in the years before his death in 1914.

Beman's beliefs concerning Christian Science architecture were set forth in a 1907 article written by him in *The World Today*, a general-interest magazine published in Chicago. The most relevant portion of the article to a discussion of Eighth Church of Christ, Scientist concerned Beman's preference for Classical Revival architecture and the distinctive practical concerns that needed to be addressed when designing a Christian Science church. Beman stated that churches in the new denomination had been designed both in the Classical and the Gothic styles, but that the former was to be preferred to the latter. As he wrote:

The Gothic style has been interwoven in warp and woof with everything ecclesiastical and the emotional ceremony and forms of what is called the Orthodox Church. In fact, the Gothic style is the very outgrowth and development of such ritualisms, and is quite the essential artistic frame and background of ecclesiastical rites and ceremonies. It is, then, hardly to be expected that Christian Science should find its expression through its churches to any great extent in Gothic architecture.

Beman goes on to extol the architectural forms of ancient Greece and Rome as appropriate for the denomination:

... it follows logically that it [Christian Science] is likely to favor classic architecture for its churches. This style, with its sense of calm power and dignity, and with its true systems of proportion, its sincerity and refinement, and I may add its rationalism, seems to represent the faith of those who employ it in their houses of worship.



ABOVE: The church's stately temple front, with its eight Ionic columns supporting a triangular pediment, has an imposing presence on South Michigan Avenue. BELOW: The Ionic columns and curved clerestory windows of the East 44th Street facade are derived from ancient Roman temples and baths, while the pedimented door surrounds and slender lantern atop the dome reflect the adaptation of Roman details by architects of the Italian Renaissance. (Charles M. Pipal, photographer)



The Grecian architecture of the Athenian Acropolis . . . is conceded by all authorities to have reached the highest architectural perfection. It is grounded on exquisite artistic subtleties of line and mass where, in the truest sense, there is nothing wanting in proportion. . . . The purest type of the ancient Greek temples was the outgrowth of a naturalistic and rationalistic religion, and reached its highest culmination of perfected beauty during the age of Pericles when the human intellect blossomed out with an artistic perfection the long ages have never dimmed, but rather have made more appreciable. . . . Their beauty is our inheritance and stands for our guidance and inspiration when we have a truly great thought to express in architectural terms.

Why then should not this straightforward and enduring architecture be the logical outward expression of a teaching which so forcefully concerns itself with the present welfare of man, and a doctrine which in so large a measure addresses itself to the well-being of the individual man here on earth?

Having stated his philosophical approach to Christian Science church architecture, Beman then settled into a discussion of practical design considerations. He noted that Christian Science services place great emphasis on the spoken word, interaction between readers and the congregation, and physical comfort. First of all, the acoustical quality of the auditorium should be excellent. Not only must the readers speaking from the readers' platform be audible to the congregation, but the voices of members, speaking from their seats during Wednesday night services, needed to project to all parts of the room regardless of their oratorical skills. Excellent lighting, both natural and artificial, also was necessary since the congregation participated in responsive readings. In addition, the physical comfort of members while listening to the services was considered important. It was believed that an uncomfortable person would not be able to concentrate on the meaning of the readings and would derive little benefit from them. Therefore, comfortable seating was necessary, and Beman recommended individual theater seats or pews arranged auditorium-style on a raking floor to improve sightlines.

Beman also placed great emphasis on adequate circulation patterns as an enhancement of a congregation's comfort and enjoyment of their building. He preferred to place foyers, cloakrooms, and circulation corridors on the first floor of a Christian Science church, while raising the auditorium to the second floor. He especially stressed the importance of a spacious lobby, stating that the presence of one distinguished a Christian Science church from most other church buildings. A rule of thumb determining its size was that it should be large enough to accommodate a standing crowd approximating seventy percent of the auditorium's capacity. Besides its use as a circulation space, the typical lobby fulfilled social needs, providing a convenient place for members to talk with each other before and after services and for parents to wait for their children after Sunday School. A central stairway

from the main foyer, plus staircases placed in the four corners of the building, provided convenient, comfortable access to the auditorium.

Along with the primary spaces within a Christian Science church, Beman also discusses the need for certain auxiliary spaces. Small rooms for the two readers and soloist should be sited with easy access to the readers' platform. Also necessary were a conference room for the board of directors, additional committee rooms if needed, an office for the church clerk, and a public Reading Room where Christian Science literature could be perused. In addition, a well-lighted Sunday School room should be provided if building funds permitted.

Beman illustrated his article with photographs of several Christian Science churches, including a number of his own designs. All but one used classical architectural forms and ornament. In addition, his Christian Science churches in Chicago, where he designed buildings for six of the first seven congregations, tended to reflect the advice concerning style and layout given in his article. By strongly establishing a precedent of Classical Revival architecture for Christian Science churches, Beman set an example that later Chicago architects working for the denomination also followed.

## The Design and Construction of Eighth Church of Christ, Scientist

Eighth Church of Christ, Scientist was established in 1907 when one hundred and eighty-five members of the fast growing and crowded First Church petitioned the board of directors for permission to withdraw and form a new congregation. The opening services for Eighth Church were attended by approximately 800 people and were held on June 16, 1907 at Bournique's Hall, 315 East 23rd Street, which was to be their home until the construction of a church building. During these early years, a local Reading Room was located in the Lexington Hotel, 2135 South Michigan Avenue (designated a Chicago Landmark on January 23, 1985). Rapidly growing attendance stimulated the congregation's desire to build their own building, which they originally intended to locate north of 35th Street. However, the changing nature of the Near South Side and the encroachment of businesses into what had been a fashionable residential area encouraged them to look farther south to the neighborhood surrounding Grand Boulevard.

The Grand Boulevard community area had developed as a middle- and upper-income neighborhood during the late nineteenth century. Early factors that played a role in the area's growth included the Chicago Fire of 1871 and the development of the Chicago boulevard system. Sparsely settled with scattered farmhouses as late as 1870, residential development in Grand Boulevard was boosted by the many families leaving Chicago for suburban housing after the Fire. The construction of Grand Boulevard itself, today known as Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, as a wide, beautifully landscaped promenade encouraged its development as a high-class residential street, lined with expensive mansions, handsome churches, and exclusive clubs. The surrounding streets attracted middle-income families who inhabited smaller rowhouses, detached residences, and apartment buildings. These

early settlers tended to be native-born Americans of English, Scottish, and Irish descent, followed by German Jews after 1900. Annexation by the city in 1889 and the improvement of public transportation into the area, especially the construction of the elevated railroad, hastened the area's development. By the time of Eighth Church's construction in 1910, Grand Boulevard had become a mature neighborhood with fine homes and a variety of social and religious institutions.

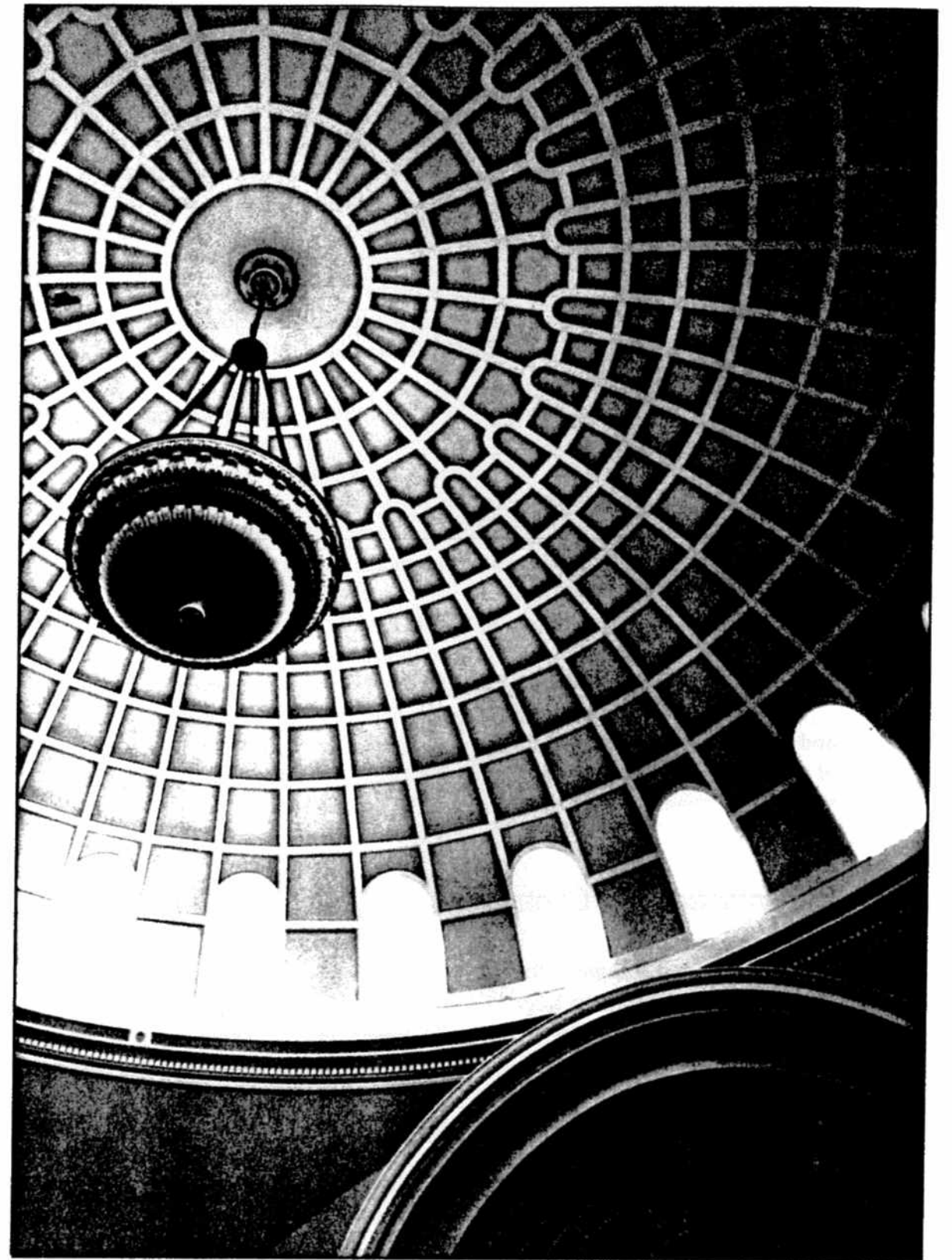
The building lot finally acquired by the congregation was located on the northeast corner of East 44th Street and South Michigan Avenue and was purchased for \$18,000 at a Cook County auction by William B. Jerome on June 1, 1910. A passenger agent for the New York Central Railroad, Jerome appears to have been acting on behalf of Eighth Church, since he then deeded the property on June 30, 1910 to Eighth Church for a token one dollar. It is not known whether or not Jerome was a member of the church, but he was a resident of the immediate neighborhood, living at 4740 South Prairie Avenue at the time of the purchase, then moving to 4528 South Michigan Avenue within a few years.

The congregation moved quickly once the purchase of the lots was finalized. Building plans were certainly advanced by July 9, 1910, when the architect hired by Eighth Church, Leon E. Stanhope, advertised in *American Contractor* for construction bids for the new 1,300-seat church, estimated to cost \$100,000. An article in the April 1917 issue of *The Christian Science Journal* states that building operations began July 27, although the building permit was not issued until August 4. The cornerstone was laid early on the morning of October 20, and construction proceeded rapidly, with services held in the new building for the first time on Sunday, June 25, 1911. Fundraising was completed two years later, and the congregation, free from debt, dedicated their new building on November 23, 1913.

The new church appears today much as it did upon completion, an impressive Classical Revival edifice, the design of which is strongly influenced by ancient Greek and Roman temples and the Christian Science churches designed by Solon S. Beman. Clad with gray Indiana limestone, the church faces South Michigan Avenue with an impressive portico of eight large Ionic columns supporting an entablature and triangular pediment. Within the entablature's frieze is inscribed a passage from the Book of Revelation: "Behold, the Tabernacle of God is with men." The East 44th Street facade is dominated by two engaged Ionic columns, supporting an extension of the front entablature and set within a recess filled with stained glass windows. Twin doors, decorated with segmental-arched stone frames derived from Italian Renaissance prototypes, flank this grouping of columns and windows, while a round-arched clerestory window, similar to those used in the design of ancient Roman baths, provides additional light for the auditorium. The church is capped with a shallow dome, reminiscent of the ancient Roman Pantheon, set atop a drum pierced with round-arched, stained-glass windows. A tall, narrow pressed-metal lantern, resembling an Italian Renaissance *tempietto*, rises above the dome, providing a visual punctuation that draws the eye upwards. The resulting design is solid and serene, an interpretation of Greco-Roman architectural traditions that is not beholden to the later Gothic or Romanesque.



ABOVE: The main foyer of Eighth Church is a serenely beautiful space when afternoon light streams through the many French doors and leaded-glass transoms. BELOW: During the day, the 1,300-seat auditorium fills with light from the ring of windows within the dome. The readers' platform at the front of the auditorium is flanked by inscriptions from the Bible and the writings of Mary Baker Eddy. (Timothy N. Wittman, photographer)



The largest of several light fixtures within the auditorium is suspended from the coffered dome. Manufactured by the National X-ray Reflector Company, these custom-made fixtures, detailed with acanthus leaves, bathe the room with indirect light. (Timothy N. Wittman, photographer)

The interior of Eighth Church follows closely Beman's ideas concerning the proper layout for Christian Science churches. Entering the church from Michigan Avenue, a visitor passes through golden oak doors into a spacious foyer with a subtly vaulted ceiling and a white tile floor, edged with a Greek key pattern executed in dark gray. Staircases in each corner of the building, plus a wide staircase on axis with the main entrance, provide access to the second-floor auditorium. This light-filled space is shaped like a T with shallow arms and is furnished with curved rows of golden oak pews, resting on a raked floor, that focus the attention of the congregation towards the readers' platform at the front of the room. Set within a large round-arched niche flanked with paired Ionic pilasters, the readers' platform with its podium and chairs is backed by painted wooden paneling and a metal grille, decorated with classical moldings, that conceals organ pipes. Eighth Church has a valuable Hood and Hastings organ, built especially for the church and a source of great pride to the congregation.

Light plays an important role in the appearance of the auditorium. During the day, light streams into the room through large windows on the north and south walls, plus smaller windows nestled under the columns on the Michigan Avenue facade. In addition, the coffered dome above is flooded with light from its encircling ring of windows, visually dematerializing its connection to the supporting walls and allowing it to "float" lightly over the auditorium. At night the room is lighted by hanging fixtures, manufactured by the National X-Ray Reflector Company in Chicago, that employ reflectors in an indirect system of illumination. Decorated with Greek key moldings and acanthus leaves to harmonize with the classical appearance of the church, these light fixtures radiate a gentle, even light that was considered aesthetically pleasing by the manufacturer.

Eighth Church also has a spacious Sunday School room, located behind the auditorium and lighted with a large stained glass skylight. Beneath the Sunday School are a number of smaller rooms, including the church office, a meeting room for the board of directors, and private rooms for the readers, organist, and soloist.

## The Architect and Contractors

The architect for Eighth Church, Leon Eugene Stanhope, was born on October 9, 1873, in Lee County, Illinois, to Eugene and Isabel Raymond Stanhope. He moved to Chicago at the age of fourteen to attend high school and to begin work as an architectural draftsman. One architectural firm for which Stanhope worked was the office of Burnham and Root in 1891 and 1892, where he participated in the drafting of designs for the World's Columbian Exposition. He also served in the 1st Regiment of the Illinois National Guard from 1890 to 1892.

Biographical information concerning Stanhope is somewhat incomplete, but available records indicate that he started his own architectural practice in 1894, the same year that he married his wife, Maude Dorothy Leggett. The following year, he and John E.O.

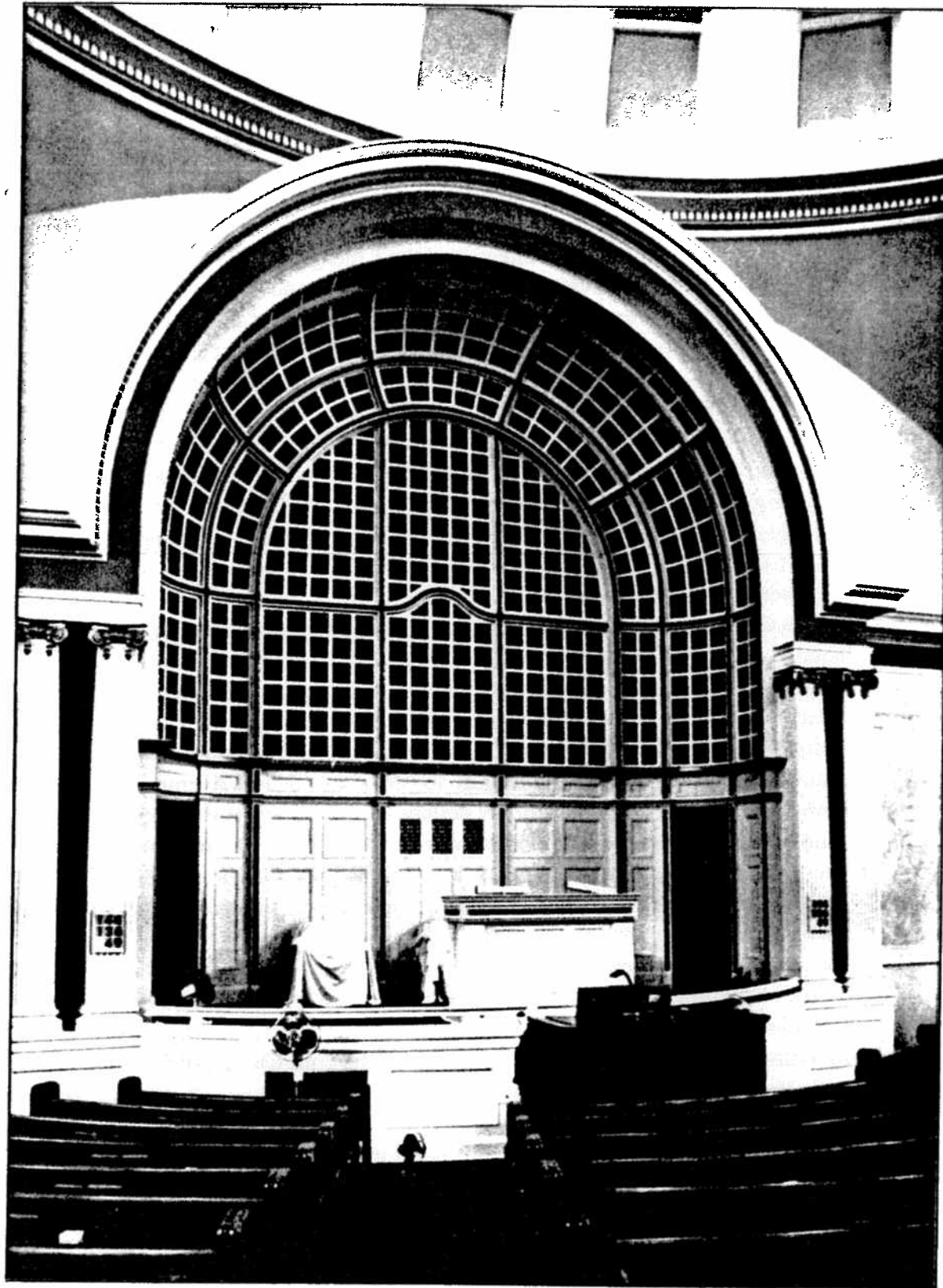
Pridmore formed a partnership, Pridmore & Stanhope, that lasted until 1897. From 1903 until 1906, Stanhope served as deputy commissioner of buildings for the City of Chicago, after which he returned to private practice. He continued to involve himself in municipal government, however, serving on the Winnetka Planning Commission from 1916 to 1918 and the Glencoe Planning Commission for four years, beginning in 1926. Stanhope retired from architectural practice in the early 1950s and died on October 21, 1956, at the age of 83, leaving one daughter, Dorothy Stanhope Balkam.

Actively involved in professional and social organizations, Stanhope was a member of the American Institute of Architects and the Chicago Architects' Business Association. He joined the Chicago Architectural Club in 1904 and was a patron of several of its exhibitions. In addition, he showed his own work there at least once, submitting elevation drawings and floor plans of Eighth Church of Christ, Scientist for the 1911 exhibition, held at the Art Institute of Chicago. A member of the Illinois Society of Architects from 1897, Stanhope accepted a number of offices with the organization, acting as editor for the monthly *I.S.A. Bulletin* and serving as a member of the Society's board of directors, as chairman of its Committee on Public Action, and as I.S.A. president from 1926 to 1928. Working in a profession dependent upon personal contacts and referrals, Stanhope belonged to a variety of social organizations during his life, including the Masons, the City and Hamilton clubs, and the Medinah Athletic Club. He was an avid golfer and kept a membership with the Skokie Country Club.

Stanhope's architectural practice has not been well-documented, but it appears to have been a varied one. Several buildings were documented by the Chicago Historic Resources Survey during its nine-year survey of the city, including an 1897 graystone three-flat at 6243 South Woodlawn Avenue, designed while in partnership with Pridmore; a stucco house designed in 1910 for the broker, F.J. Holzapfel, at 5347 North Lakewood Avenue; and an animal hospital and office building at 157-59 West Grand Avenue, built in 1935 for the Anti-Cruelty Society. Other known designs include a seven-story loft building for the A. Plamondon Manufacturing Company, constructed on the northwest corner of South Clinton and West Monroe streets in 1906. Demolished a number of years ago, the Plamondon Building is believed to have been the first reinforced-concrete building built in Chicago. Stanhope also designed the Peters Office Building in Columbus, Ohio, in 1916, using similar construction techniques.

An important portion of Stanhope's architectural practice was devoted to the design of Christian Science churches. Besides Eighth Church of Christ, Scientist, he designed the sanctuary for another Chicago congregation, Eleventh Church of Christ, Scientist, located at 2836-40 West Logan Boulevard, completed in 1917. Other church designs include First Church of Christ, Scientist, Oak Park, built in 1914; First Church of Christ, Scientist, Columbus, Ohio, constructed in 1915; and First Church of Christ, Scientist, South Bend, Indiana, finished in 1917. He also served as consulting architect to the congregation building First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Sydney, Australia, in 1912.

Less is known about the contractors responsible for the construction of Eighth Church of Christ, Scientist. George H. Fox and Frederick Klippel were masons with separate



The readers' platform is the visual focus of the auditorium and is contained within a great arch, flanked with fluted Ionic pilasters. The metal grille, detailed with classical moldings, conceals pipes for the church's Hood and Hastings organ. (Timothy N. Wittman, photographer)

businesses when they joined forces in 1902, establishing the firm of Fox & Klippel. The partnership lasted until 1911, when Klippel left to become secretary of the Chicago Masons and Builders Association. Fox & Klippel were the contractors for two other Christian Science churches in Chicago, Fourth Church of Christ, Scientist, located at 6657 South Harvard Avenue in the Englewood neighborhood, and Fifth Church of Christ, Scientist, built at 4840-50 South Dorchester Avenue in the Kenwood neighborhood. Both churches were designed by Solon S. Beman in 1904.

### The Later History of Eighth Church of Christ, Scientist

In the years after its construction, Eighth Church of Christ, Scientist and its congregation became witnesses to great social change on Chicago's South Side. African-Americans had lived in the Grand Boulevard area as early as 1890, but the major black migration into the neighborhood began during World War I and accelerated during the boom years of the twenties. Blacks were leaving the South and moving to northern cities, including Chicago, in record numbers during these years, drawn by the promise of greater economic and social freedom. The residential neighborhoods to which the majority of blacks formerly had been restricted, centered along Federal Street to the northwest, were not large enough to house the newcomers, who were forced into formerly white residential areas in their search for affordable housing. Grand Boulevard's stock of well-built houses and apartment buildings, combined with convenient transportation, made it very attractive. By 1920, African-Americans were 32 percent of the community area's population, a percentage that grew to 95 percent by 1930.

As Grand Boulevard changed from predominantly white to predominantly black, churches and other institutions began to sell their buildings and follow their members to other neighborhoods. An exception was Eighth Church of Christ, Scientist. Christian Science had long been a denomination that encouraged the integration of whites and blacks within the same congregation. Robert L. Sutherland, in his 1930 doctoral dissertation on black churches in Chicago, comments upon this situation, which was unusual among predominantly white denominations in the city. At the time of his research in the late 1920s, Eighth Church's typical attendance was approximately 800, of which one-half were black. Although no African-Americans had been named as readers up to this point, one served on the governing board of the church.

In 1932, a decision was made by the board of directors of the Mother Church in Boston to offer black members their own Christian Science congregation in Chicago. Eighth Church had the largest black attendance of the many Christian Science churches in the city, and its location in the heart of the new South Side black neighborhoods pointed to its choice. Since that time, the congregation of Eighth Church of Christ, Scientist has taken pride in being the first African-American Christian Science church in Chicago and the United States.



## Eighth Church of Christ, Scientist Today

The more than eighty years since the construction of Eighth Church of Christ, Scientist has seen remarkably little change in the building's physical appearance or its use. Beautifully maintained by the congregation, Eighth Church has excellent physical integrity in both its exterior and interior, retaining original doors, stained glass windows, tile floors and even the original hardware in its cloakroom. Appearing almost as it did upon its completion in 1911 and in continuous use as a Christian Science church, Eighth Church of Christ, Scientist is a stable institutional force in its neighborhood and a source of pride to its members.



Doorways leading into the auditorium have decorative surrounds similar to those that ornament the East 44th Street entrances. (Timothy N. Wittman, photographer)

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Additional research material used in the preparation of this report is on file at the office of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks and is available to the public.

The author would like to thank Mrs. Doris I. Jones for her kindness in sharing historical information on Eighth Church, as well as Prof. Paul E. Ivey of the University of Arizona for his generosity in sharing his dissertation on Christian Science church architecture.

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*The Commission makes its recommendations to the City Council only after extensive study. This preliminary summary of information has been prepared by the Commission staff and was submitted to the Commission when it initiated consideration of the historical and architectural qualities of this potential landmark.*